DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 160 957 CG 012 905

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TITLE College Without Fear: Preparing Students for the Predictable Crises of Post-Secondary Experience.
PUB DATE 22 Mar 78
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (Washington, D.C., March 19-23, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Bound Students; *College Preparation; Counseling Programs; *Counselor Role; Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *High School Students; Postsecondary Education; Program Descriptions

ABSTRACT

This paper asks why college students fail, not only in the sense of academic criteria, but also in terms of the quality of the total college experience. It also considers what counselors can do to insure the best chance for success for their students in their new college environment. The author examines the developmental process of transition and then explores methods by which high school seniors and new college students may be prepared to deal effectively with the predictable crisis of post-secondary education. (Author)

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ED160957

College Without Fear: Preparing Students for the Predictable Crises of the Post-Secondary Experience.

Presented at the National Meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington D.C., March 22nd.

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Why do college students fail? Fail, not only in the sense of academic criteria, but also in terms of the quality of the total college experience. What can we as educators do to insure the best chance for success for our students in their new college environment?

Education, of all human activity, may most easily be described as a developmental process. Students progress through the grades in orderly measured fashion, passing landmarks of elementary, middle and high school with constant measurement of progress, both academically and psychologically.

However, once the student reaches the end of high school we more or less assume the student is full-grown. Many of us feel the high school senior has cleared most of the hurdles of adolescence and what remains is the finishing of the rough material so laboriously fashioned for twelve years. We know from experience that many obstacles lie ahead for the newly graduated

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high school senior. In college new students will encounter difficulties that will result in academic failure, dropping out, transfer and general unhappiness.

We know something happens in college, something mysterious, often alarming but always potent. How can we best describe this period of rapid development and transition and how can we prepare our students to deal with the stresses they will surely face? First let us examine the developmental process of transition and then explore methods by which high school seniors and new college students may be prepared to deal effectively with the predictable crises of post-secondary education.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF TRANSITION FROM
HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE LIFE

1. Post-partum Latency. The time immediately following high school graduation, a period during which the student feels self-satisfied, confident, and eager for new challenges.

2. Incipient separation anxiety. The last days of summer, with the realization of impending separation.

3. Acute undifferentiated anxiety. The last week of summer, the orientation period, and the first two weeks of school. This period includes such activities as saying good-bye to parents, hometown, friends; meeting your new roomate for the first time, meeting the deans; first encounter with the bureaucracy; first college test; first college date. This period may also be referred to as the "honeymoon" period of unreasonable expectations regarding the glamour of college life.

4. Depression/Frustration; or, "The End of the Honeymoon" phase. (Weeks three through seven of the first semester, freshman year.) This period signals a realization of the lack of glamour in the college experience, a decline in interest, a recognition that much hard work must be done, and a time of crushing homesickness. First grades, may be disappointingly low.

5. Primitive Coping Behavior. (Weeks five through thirteen of the first semester, freshman year.) This period marks a development of the ability to use the library, first real conversations with the roomate, first "intellectual experience."

6. Return of the "repressed"period. This period marks the final days of the term, including first encounter with final examinations, with its attendant attacks of anxiety, and fear of failure.

7. "Can't go home again"; or, "How many days are left till classes begin again?".

   This phase is marked by the return home, with the concurrent realization that things have changed, or that perhaps the student has changed; and that the college experience hasn't been as bad as it may have seemed (particularly during the last days of the term, when it rained every day, and you were certain that you were suffering from terminal bronchial asthma).

8. Consolidation and Adaptation. The student returns to the college campus with the recognition that the responsibility for the college experience rests mainly on the individual, and not solely on the institution or the environment.

Note: These developmental stages may be repeated at various times throughout the college experience, and may appear in slightly different sequence depending upon the individual and the situation encountered. In some cases, these stages are protracted through the first year, and well into the sophomore or junior year.

Transition Trauma . . . The High School Responsibility

What is the role and responsibility of the high school counselor in easing the trauma of going from high school to college?

What more can we possibly do?

Why us?

These were just a few of the questions that came to mind when Fred first discussed this panel with me.

Being on the defensive . . .

I felt we were being asked to do even more for the college-bound student. Coming from a comprehensive high school where no more than 50% matriculate at a four-year college and where a major portion of our time during first semester appears allocated to the college-bound senior, should we give them any more attention?

I believe all of us here are too painfully aware of the demands made upon the Guidance Counselors of today. I also believe we are painfully aware of what we cannot do for our counselees because of these excess demands.

The counselor in us says . . .

Open doors, expand horizons, ease the pain, assess the needs, help all.

The realist in us says . . . O.K. as soon as I . . .

make 200 schedule changes because a class was cancelled

at the last minute
send out progress reports of 52 special needs students
set up a case conference
find 3 tutors
schedule 2 new students
write an in-depth, objective/subjective summary of Joe or Josephine College without repeating any previously indicated attributes
read those journals so we will be known as an educated counselor
attend professional meetings
and keep up-to-date on legislation and issues.

Let's face it, we do all of the above and more.
We care or else we would not be here today.

Well, how can we best serve that 50% who choose to be college-bound? Two important goals in this process are:

1. That our students receive the best academic preparation available to them
2. That we help our students make realistic choices at the outset

The academic preparation and course content discussions are shared throughout our school systems and will not be discussed today. Making a realistic choice, however, is a major criteria in the discussion of our responsibilities.

<u>To make a realistic choice</u> an individual must become more aware of "self". It has been our experience that most students

are unaware of their attributes, even the "best" student. To keep a proper balance, they must also be aware of their weaknesses.

A simplistic approach . . . Student Brag Sheet & Senior Date Sheet (Review the sheet)

Student responses:

1. I would really like to improve my grades and myself.
2. Quiet, responsible, respectful, aware of other people around me.
3. Organized
4. I prefer working alone or with one other person.
5. Independent, agressive, dependable, ambitious, much self-confidence, have good one to one relationships, determined when I want something.

The Brag Sheet forces students to consider all that they do with their time. Those forgotten activities, how many hours really spent as a member of the Stage Band or Drama Club, etc.

Self-appraisal is very difficult but with a simple approach, the element of humility is retained and the students develop a confidence in their potential and their individuality.

To make a realistic choice . . . an individual must be aware of "academics".

Correct selection of courses, awareness of deficiencies and the reasons for these deficiencies. A critical appraisal is important.

What does my class rank really mean?

How was it determined? (G.P. A.? W.G.P.A.?)

Do they know if they are competing with the top 1% or top 30% in English? Math? Science?

Are they aware that level 2 is average, that it is not highly competitive?

Ideally, they should be aware of the depth of their individual skills and development in the various disciplines.

Very easy to do in art, music, drama, etc. . . . as you can see by the resume.

(review resume and reason for use)

However, it is very difficult to do with the average student who has few interests.

<u>To make a realistic choice</u> . . . an individual must be aware of personal preferences and interests. (i.e. smokers, non-smokers, trees, urban, rural, sports oriented, preppie, large, small, cultural needs, research opportunities.

Again, we try to use tools that ask the student to make choices.

Some . . . Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory

G.I.S. Computer

<u>To make a realistic choice</u> . . . an individual must be aware of personal and family finances.

Students and parents must be candid with each other both in their goals and assessment of resources. Students need to be aware of the financial pressures of their parents.

This can be an eye-opener for all. Early planning can certainly ease the burden but few families are adequately prepared.

Guidance Counselors are not financial analysts nor aid officers but are responsible for disseminating correct up-to-date information for recognized aid programs.

Now that the student is aware of self, academics, personal preferences, interests and finances, what do we do and where do we go from here?

Ideally three colleges meeting all needs and spanning the recommended strata magically appear.
Not true, how about one or would you believe 11 realistic choices?

Now is the time to use other resources: campus visits, college fairs, admissions counselor visits to high schools, conversations with faculty who have attended these colleges and recommendations by counselors who are familiar with the colleges and their programs.

With our current class we feel the campus visit will be the determining factor in the case of multiple acceptances.

Let us assume: "that all the deadlines are met; that decisions and selections are made; that all who want to further their

education are placed" . . . . .

and so we move on to: scheduling, senior failures, finals, graduation and summer school.

Do you feel that you are left out in the blue somewhere?

Are you wondering . . . Is that all there is?

Are we taking our students to this point and leaving them "suspended"?

APPENDIX A

Let us view the hopes and fears of the Class of 1978.

SUMMARY

Fears	Expectations
1. losing high-school friends	1. more social freedom
2. flunking out	2. meeting a varity of people
3. can't afford it	3. more intellectually stimulating
4. roommate problems	4. help if I need it
5. dorm life	
6. excessive work load	
7. picking the wrong courses	

An Optimistic View

"I am looking forward to college. I expect and want a change as well as freedom. I want to be challenged academically. The 'trauma' comes in the social aspect of college. I think the major fear of most people is the fear of 'not fitting in', but at the same time, a new situation is exciting . . . as well as frightening. I am looking forward to the transition."

APPENDIX B

In addition to the comments of the Class of '78, a random sampling of a representative group of M.H.S. graduates was made. They are only random sampling and have no statistical validity.

Conclusion:

One respondant said it very well . . .

Leaving for school is just another part of life, which one can forsee, prepare for mentally and deal with on his own level and speed.

In this way he can say "I did it". The most important thing about this transition is regaining self-importance and stature.

We need to realize when to let go and when to hold on. We in the high schools can only bring our student so far and now we turn them over to you . . . the colleges, to nurture, care, protect and prepare them for their next adventure in life.

NAME: _____

COLLEGE ATTENDING: _____

I. Selecting the Right College

a. Did you receive appropriate assistance? Yes All but 1 x No _____

b. Are you satisfied with your choice? Yes All but 3 No _____

c. What/who was the major influence in your selecting to attend this college? Counselor, reputation of school, program, atmosphere, parent, teacher, location.

d. Would you transfer if you had the chance? Yes 3 No _____

e. To where? Different type of school

f. Why? Was too isolated; the students were too competitive among one another; not my type of people. The courses are great but I don't like the atmosphere of a private school.

II. Preparation for College

a. Are you academically prepared? Yes mostly No _____

If no, why not? (what subject area?) but need more writing skills - All literature & no basics - Budgeting time and coping with only 1 exam.

b. Are you prepared to handle the social demands of your college?

Yes All No _____

What do you feel is the most difficult social adjustment facing freshmen? Prevailing permissiveness; the need to belong, meeting so many new people, leaving friends and the security of home; being totally independent for the 1st.time;after being a big man on campus and finding out I was one of 4,000 other big men finding out - you can't go home again.

III. On Campus

"You never told me it would be like this". (What should we have told you to make the transition easier? Please comment on this... would you have thought an orientation held after your acceptance would be helpful and would you have taken the time to attend a session?)

Dorms are not conducive to study; neither are liberal hours, sleeping over, drinking. If traditionalist is in for a shocker! The experiences are part of college-being academically prepared-I could cope with the past - Give it time & be open-minded.

IV. Ideal Orientation Program

Returning students in a frank open-ended discussion. Not the usual returning alumni program.

(over, if you need more space)

Note: Part of the college experience should be a surprise.

COMMENTS TO STUDENTS

Your life will be different when you go to college. Many of the changes you have already considered, but probably there are others that you haven't. Its for this reason I want to make a few comments.

When something unpleasant or difficult happens the degree of discomfort and disruption, are lessened if you were expecting it. Some of the adjustments at college will also be unpleasant or difficult but the degree of distress they will cause you and the length of time you will be uncomfortable can be reduced if you know they are coming.

The following are common, normal, and transitory difficulties that you will face in your first year at college. I'd like to repeat that. These are normal, experienced by most students, and they do pass after a certain time period.

One normal difficulty is the emotional experience of grieving. When you go away to school for the first time you will experience a loss, a loss of family and friends, and you may go through a grieving process just as if there had been a death.

You may also experience a loss of comforts. If you are accustomed to having a room, a car, someone to clean the room, your own ping pong table, pool table, swimming pool, records, or whatever it may be, you may, upon arrival at college, experience great discomfort at having to share small quarters with another person.

Another loss will be one of status. As a high school senior, you had respect of teachers and other students, you knew how to get things done, and felt like part of the system. Now entering a University, these familiar cues and relationships have gone. You will be at the bottom of the totem pole once again.

Another difficulty comes from unrealistic expectations. Frequently students think, "I am going off to college!" and this somehow is magical. It isn't magical. You are still the same person, just in a different setting. There will be up and downs; high school wasn't perfect, camp wasn't perfect, working wasn't perfect, and college won't be perfect either. Understanding this helps to make it palatable.

A third area that will demand flexibility and patience is adjusting to a new situation. Keeping in mind that you have adjusted before and can again will be helpful. Adjustment will be difficult, but hopefully short lived. Friendships are not formed over night. The friends you are leaving may have been classmates for the past twelve years. The new people you meet after three months will not be as close as twelve-year friends. However, given time, new relationships will be made.

Another common feeling of students is that of being left out or not belonging, especially if a person feels, "I should feel like I belong." For example, when students join Greek organizations they frequently feel that they are supposed to love all the brothers or sisters. When they realize there are some that they like very much, others they don't care for and many that they feel neutral towards, they can be quite upset; however, this is normal. If you are aware that fraternities and sororities offer certain advantages, but one of them is not that you will love everyone in the group, then you can adjust to it more easily.

When I went to college, a person on my hall said, "Each time you're alone, you know it because you're there, but you're not there when I'm alone." Realizing that your feelings are shared, you aren't the only one feeling that way but others are keeping their feelings to themselves, also, may make your feelings more tolerable and help you to extend yourself to others.

Social self-doubts are common to have in a new social situation. I'd encourage you to go through rush and use it to meet people, both peers and upperclass students, whether or not you have an intention of pledging. Also, I'd encourage you to use Orientation in the same kind of way, to meet people and learn what is going on at the school. Personal satisfaction can probably be related to ability to create a meaningful environment. My advice is to join something you like, take responsibility for it, make it meaningful. If you enjoy jogging, don't give it up just because you have gone to college. If you enjoy it, make sure it is part of your own environment.

Dorm life can be very rewarding or can cause some difficulties. Know your own quirks and state them in advance. What kind of visitation do you want? Do you want your roommate's boyfriend or girlfriend sleeping in your room? It is your room and it's OK to say NO. It's easier to state your preferences in advance than to room with someone who smokes, find out that you are very unhappy about it and try to change it. Think ahead. What are your own quirks, what is important to you?

It happens usually around mid-term time that people start talking about leaving, about transfering to another school. A student who is intending to stay gets the feeling that everyone who is good is leaving, "What's the matter with me that I'm staying?" Recently I was at a meeting and one student said"I'm transfering out of here, the Political Science Department is terrible." Another person right next to him said "Gee, that's why I came here; this school has an excellent Political Science Department." It is important to remember that you need to find what's good for you and that the same thing isn't good for everybody.

Intellectual self-doubts are common when entering a new academic setting. I think it is helpful to realize that the competition is tougher and that not everybody can be at the top. First semester grades may be lower due to social and academic adjustment. Where previously assignments were given in small steps, college students need to budget their own time and pace themselves. This is learned, but it takes time and experience. If you need

you can get it through resident advisors, good students, upperclass students, Greek organizations, and study skills programs often offered through the Counseling Center. Wanting to do better and being willing to take the steps in that direction reflect motivation and intelligent use of your environment. A book by Morgan and Deese, How to Study, is quite helpful.

Arrange your classes around how you study best, not how you party best. Do you want a mid-term test at 9:00, 10:00 and 11:00? Plan ahead so that you will have a better chance of doing the necessary studying.

I am often amazed and dismayed to frequently find that first year students are not aware that they can talk to their teachers. When I ask, "What did the teacher say when you talked to her?" they'll say "Oh, I didn't know that I could talk to her." I'm not sure what the difference is between high school and college, but college teachers need to be approachable and you need to approach them. The degree to which you are known as a number or as a person depends on your initiative in talking with your teachers. Some of your teachers will be graduate students called Teaching Assistants or TA's and are from foreign countries. Most Universities use Teaching Assistants and particularly in introductory courses, however if you feel you have too many and are dissatisfied, find out from your dean or academic advisor if any changes are possible.

Another surprise that you can be prepared for is changes in your class schedule . Frequently the courses and the times that you had chosen during pre-registration will be changed. Sections are closed out and your schedule may be changed. You have four years to get the courses you need and so preference is usually given to upperclass students who have less options available. Anyway, it's happened to me many times that I later was glad I didn't get what I wanted and thought would be best.

Use your first two years to explore the various offerings of the University since the Universities do not demand a choice of major until the third year. Humanities give a versatile background which will stand you in good stead in a changing job situation. Use your summer jobs as well, to gain information about careers. Perhaps, you have never taken a course in geology, in acting, or in architecture. Although today's students want security I encourage you to figure out what you like to do and what you do well rather than what is available to do.

One word about taking care of yourself. Mononucleosis or measles can be socially and academically inconvenient. Illness often brings depression and creates a situation of having less available energy and more study demands. Take care and try to avoid illness. Also find out what is safe and what isn't. You will be in an unknown environment and the ropes there may be different from what you were used to in your home town. As a final note, participate in Orientation, get to know and use the college's resources, human and hardware, and find out what exists on your campus that will be supportive of you and your goals.

Best wishes and I hope you will have a good year!

COMMENTS TO PARENTS

If this is your first time to be the parent of a college student, welcome to the fold, and if you are a repeater, welcome back.

In my work as a counselor in a counseling center and as Co-Director of Orientation I have noticed adjustment difficulties that seem to be normal yet distressing to the student. With this in mind I would like to make some comments as to what you can expect from your college student and how you can be helpful during the adjustment period.

Competition for college grades is keen and your student may not perform at the same level as in high school. This does not necessarily indicate that the student hasn't been studying, but it is more a reflection of the increased competition. Also, there generally is a period of time where students learn to regulate their time between social life and academic life. During this time grades may suffer.

The student who has been in high school where assignments were meted out in small units may need an adjustment period to learn self-discipline and time management . Parents need to be patient while this new skill is being learned.

There are many pressures to choose a major even before the student has had a chance to explore the various offerings of the university. The student needs some exploration time, as well as the freedom to change majors several times. It is preferable to change one's major than to stay with something that is definitely distasteful, even if s/he changes from what you had hoped s/he'd enjoy. The Dept. of Labor statistics predict that we will each have three different careers during our working life and that 10% of the jobs available now will be obsolete, while another 10% which do not currently exist, will be created. I hope this information can ease your concerns if your student seems slow in finding a satisfying goal and direction.

Instead of looking for "Prince Charming" students are now looking for "Career Charming"which does not exist for most people. A liberal arts education helps one to form questions, seek answers, and to express oneself. It provides a general base for a changing work world. If you can take the pressure off your student to choose a major before s/he is ready, you both will probably be happier in the long run.

Other than getting good grades, getting into graduate school, and developing the skills necessary to support oneself, there are several important benefits gained from attending college. Independence is one. Growth brings changed relationships and an unfamiliar state which often is uncomfortable, both for the parents and for the students. When my friend's only daughter went to school I asked him how she was doing. He replied, "She's doing fine, but I'm having a terrible time." You may also face a temporary uncomfortable period of adjustment as the patterns of family communication and relationships change.

While parents need to encourage independence, it is also important to realize that your student may be making major decisions for the first time and feel somewhat unsure. Students frequently want to check with their parents and get their ideas, even though the students may not then follow your ideas. It's important for the student to know that you are available as a backup.

Students have an ambivalence regarding independence. They may worry that things at home need their attention - a sick parent or a sibling. This may negatively affect their ability to study. On the other hand, their worry may be just the opposite, that things are going fine at home without them. They worry that they are not missed. They want to know that they are missed. They need to hear from you.

Students going home during vacations chaff under restrictions because they feel their stress and efforts to grow up aren't recognized. They may have very angry feelings at being pushed out of the nest, about having their room taken over by other siblings who are using their records, their clothes, or whatever. You might discuss with the student before s/he leaves, what changes you are planning and then understand their anger when they return home and have to accept the fact that their relationship with the family has changed.

Parents should expect higher phone bills about two weeks after school has begun. It's at this time that disappointment over unrealistically high expectations and loneliness is severe. During November, right before Christmas break, and in February "care packages' might be helpful. These are typically difficult times for students due to the stress of school work and the normal process of adjustment.

Another reason for going to college is to become interpersonally sensitive. Parents frequently think, "Our child is great," but this feeling may not be unanimous. A student needs to know how others respond to him or her. One psychiatrist says, "You go off to college to find out what your psychological B.O. is." Often this learning is painful and parents, although they want to control it and solve it, are unable to do so. During the first year, students have many problems with loud stereos, using each others clothes, and in general not being interpersonally sensitive. After they have been at school for a while they usually learn to adjust and learn to accommodate to others. It is an important experience, frequently learned with some agony, but a necessary part of becoming a responsible adult, a life task of people of college age.

In addition to understanding what your student will experience psychologically due to the change in surrounding and expectations, there are other aspects of the college experience which can cause friction and discomfort. Some of these can be avoided with adequate information and planning.

Before your student goes off to school, it would be helpful if you sat down together and looked at finances. How much is going to be needed and when is it going to be needed? Worry and confusion over finances can be very disruptive to study. Work study should be evaluated in terms of its convenience in time and location and it's low rate of pay. It is important to understand your student's financial package and it's relationship to

GPA, and change in family income or expenditure. Talk with the financial aid office if the written information you receive doesn't answer your questions.

Parents need to understand that students 18 years old and older are protected by law to certain privacy. If you, as a parent, want to have information about the student, generally the University can not give that information without the student's permission. This might be very annoying since you are paying the bill. All people of adult age are entitled to privacy and protected by law and the University must abide by this law.

There are many people at the University who will care for and about your student once s/he leaves you. Feel free to contact them if you need assistance or advice.

It is difficult to realize that you can no longer protect and control your student. S/he is like a butterfly straining to leave the cocoon. Outside help in leaving the cocoon prevents the butterfly's wings from developing the necessary strength to fly and fulfill their role. The same is true now as your son or daughter leaves the home nest. They must accept the responsibility and challenge of developing themselves to fulfill a role they choose.

I hope you the parent(s), we at the University, and most importantly the students will be satisfied and proud of the life that they choose and the part that we each have played in it.

ORIENTATION

The following is the structure of Orientation at Tulane, how we are set up to plan Orientation, and what we actually do during Orientation.

There is a Director of Orientation who is the Associate Dean of Students and is responsible for planning and coordination.

The Director of Admissions controls and coordinates the flow of information from the first contact with students until they arrive on campus.

There is a member from the Counseling Center who is responsible for recruiting and training Coordinators who essentially carry out Orientation.

An Advisory Committee is made up of: Associate Academic Deans, the Director of Security, Registrar, Director of Residential Life, a Faculty Member, a Resident Advisor, a Representative from student government, the students' Programming Advisor, and a Secretary.

One part of Orientation is directed toward parents and one part toward students. The parents' part includes a newsletter, a welcoming convocation, and a luncheon. During the luncheon parents eat with upperclass students, and the administrators introduce themselves. The parents' orientation ends later in the day with the President's reception.

Orientation for the students begins prior to their arrival on campus and consists of newsletters and the Frosh, which is a student magazine telling about the University including the pictures of the incoming students.

Once on campus, Orientation is carried out in small groups led by trained upperclass students called Coordinators. They are trained during a two day retreat and learn small group techniques, are made aware of the program for the year, are informed about academic advising, and are impressed with the philosophy that their mission is to help students adjust and to answer their questions.

The academic part of Orientation consists of faculty advising, receptions by colleges, registration, and faculty lectures. The Library tour and study skills instruction part of Orientation are delayed until two weeks after classes begin.

During the Orientation period students are logistically, socially, and academically oriented. This process begins in a small group of approximately eight first year students and one coordinator. Over the three day Orientation period, the size of the interaction group increases when small groups join together for certain activities. While the size of the group increases, the focus increases from personal, to college information, to University information, to an introduction to the local community, and ends with a tour of the French Quarter and a dinner dance on a river boat for the entire incoming class and coordinators.